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## REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

**Posting Date: July 1, 2024**

**Issued By: USAID/Philippines and Mongolia, Regional Office of Acquisition and Assistance**

**Reference Number: 72049224-EO/RFI-00002**

**Response Closing Date: July 22, 2024**

**Closing time: 15:00 Hours Manila Time**

**Notice Type: Request for Information**

To: All Interested Parties,

This is a Request for Information (RFI) to obtain information, opinions, and recommendations from all interested parties with respect to a proposed water security activity in the Philippines. This is not a Request for Proposals, a Request for Quotations, an Invitation for Bids, or a Solicitation, nor is it an indication USAID/Philippines and Mongolia will issue a solicitation to address the goals, objectives or challenges described herein.

Responses to this notice are not offers and cannot be accepted by the U.S. government to form a binding contract or agreement. USAID will not pay respondents for information provided in response to this RFI. Responses to this RFI will not be returned, and respondents will not be notified of the results of the review. If a Solicitation is issued, it will be posted on SAM.gov or Grants.gov. Parties are responsible to regularly check those websites for updates or solicitations and must respond to such a solicitation separately from any response to this announcement. Respondents are solely responsible for bearing any expenses associated with preparation and submission of their response to this RFI.

Responses to this RFI are strictly voluntary. Parties may respond in whole or in part to the questions herein. Responding or not responding to this RFI will neither advantage nor disadvantage any organization nor lead to an organizational conflict of interest in any subsequent solicitation. USAID will not publicize responses nor acknowledge receipt of answers in response to this RFI. Responses will be held confidential within USAID.

Thank you for your assistance and interest in USAID programming.

Sincerely,

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## Activity Concept

The new Philippine Fishery Activity will address unsustainable fishing (i.e., overfishing and illegal, unreported, and unregulated [IUU] fishing) and its drivers by supporting evidence-based policy development; promoting sustainable harvest strategies, and increasing compliance with fisheries policies in [Fisheries management Areas \(FMAs\)](#). The activity will address the loss of livelihoods from the unsustainable extraction and resource destruction caused by the coercive actions of foreign fleets. This activity will also catalyze inclusive engagement with small-scale fishers, women associations, fishing industry players, and civil society organizations (CSOs).

## Background

The Philippines is part of the Coral Triangle region that is recognized as the center of marine biodiversity, hosting more coral reef species than anywhere else in the world. The Philippines is also home to a unique plethora of coral reefs, seagrass, seaweeds, mangroves, invertebrates, and marine mammals. There are a number of threats to these critical ecosystems, but unsustainable fishing threatens the long-term ecological stability as well as the food security, livelihoods, and ecosystem services that are critically important for communities across the Philippines.

Overfishing threatens this rich marine biodiversity, resulting in a sharp decline in fish populations. As of 2023, 80 percent of the commercially important fish stocks in Philippine waters were overfished and fisheries in the Philippines have the highest rates of overfishing in Southeast Asia. Among the top food staple for Filipinos, 7 of the 17 roundscad (*galunggong*) and 4 of 15 sardines (*tamban*) stocks are overfished. This situation puts pressure on the ocean's ability to provide food, income, and nutrition to Filipinos. This is coupled with the data that approximately 85 percent of Filipino fishers are coastal, small-scale fishers, who catch nearly half of the Philippines' total fish catch and rely on this catch for both food-security and livelihoods. Fishers are among the poorest sectors in the Philippines workforce, with a poverty incidence of 30.6 percent.<sup>1</sup> Fisheries and the communities they support are also at high risk from climate-driven changes in marine ecosystems such as increasing ocean temperature, sea level rise, and changing climatic patterns. In 2020, massive coral reef bleaching driven by thermal stress affected up to 42% of corals in Batangas, and the fifth global mass bleaching is currently ongoing (2024).

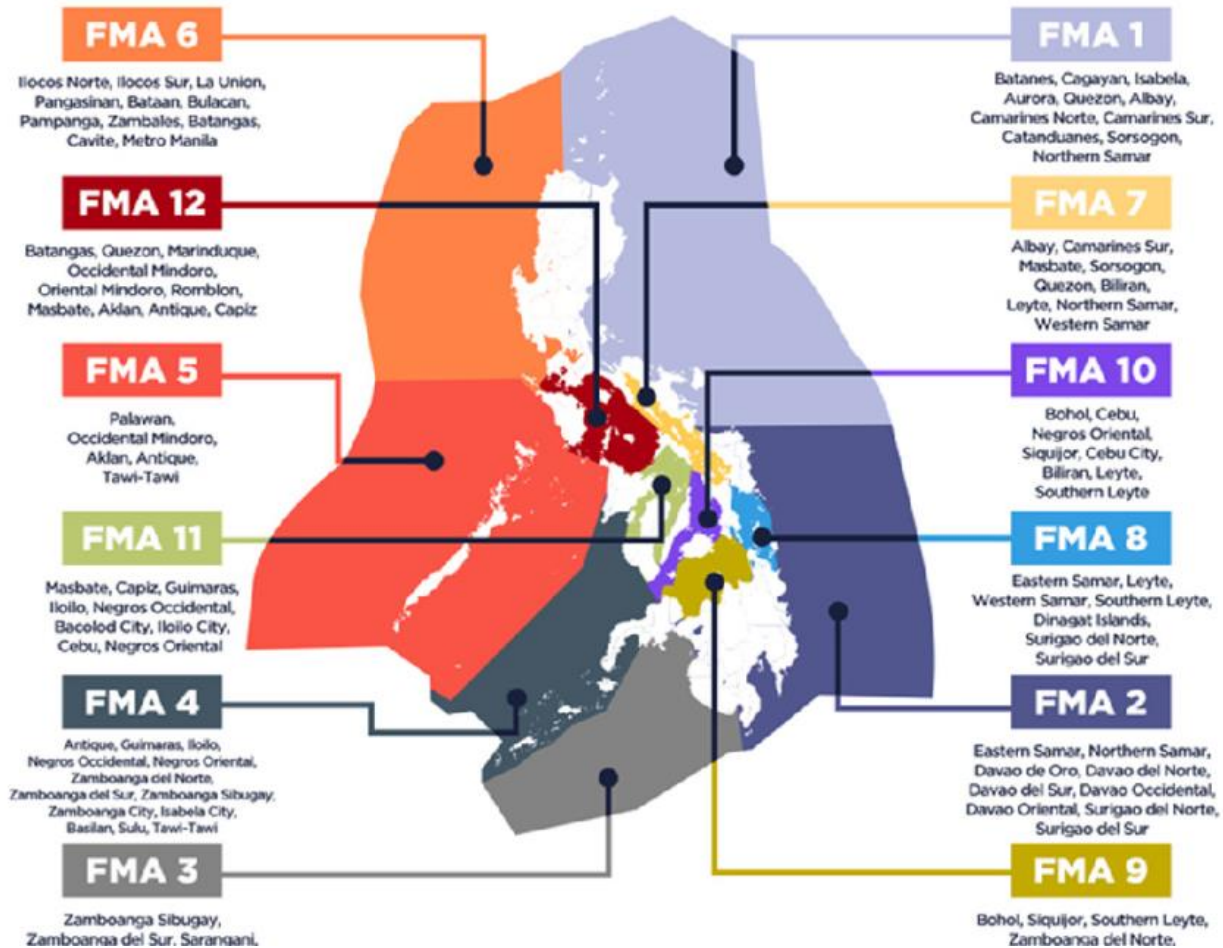
Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing is another major threat to marine biodiversity and the Philippine economy, with an estimated Php 62 billion (USD \$1.3 billion) lost to IUU fishing annually<sup>2</sup>. With the total value of the Philippine small-scale coastal fisheries valued at approximately USD \$1 billion, the impacts from IUU fishing become even more stark. About 27-40 percent of fishes caught in the Philippines are illegally taken by commercial boats using powerful fishing light attractors that are harmful to fish migration patterns. These boats were observed within approximately 73 percent of municipal waters (coastline to 15 km) that are

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<sup>1</sup> [PSA 2021](#)

<sup>2</sup> Counting the Cost of IUU Fishing in the Philippines 2020

reserved exclusively for small-scale fishers. In the West Philippine Sea, the persistent presence of illegal fishing fleets, including foreign flagged vessels, in domestic waters limits fisherfolk’s access to traditional fishing grounds, resulting in decreased fish catch and income. The country continues to be a hotspot for illegal wildlife trade of shells and marine turtles. Precious coral reefs have been destroyed by indiscriminately taking high-valued species like reef fishes and giant clams through destructive fishing practices such as beam trawls.



**Figure 1: Philippines Fisheries Management Area (FMA) Map<sup>3</sup>.**

To strategically act on overfishing and IUU fishing, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) divided the Philippine waters into 12 FMAs based on considerations of stock distribution, structure of fisheries, and administrative divisions (Figure 1). Co-managed by BFAR, local governments, and multi-sectoral institutions, FMAs will advance policies on harvest controls to sustainably manage fisheries based on the status and capacity of the stocks while

<sup>3</sup> Malayang III, B.S., Jacinto, G.S., Castro, J.R., Subade, R.F., Alampay, R.B.A. and Cruz, L.J., 2023. Fisheries Management Areas in the West Philippine Sea and Their Heritage Values. Asian Journal of Agriculture and Development, 20(1), pp.31-52.

taking into consideration the impact on the economic well-being of the fisherfolk. A scientific advisory council provides guidance to a management board in each FMA, providing technical assistance from universities. Currently, BFAR together with scientific advisory councils and partner universities of each FMA are conducting nationwide assessments and action planning on IUU fishing, which will inform the establishment of fish harvest control strategies in the FMAs.

The successes and lessons from USAID's past and ongoing assistance in fisheries underscore the Philippines' strong participatory and decentralized approach in managing habitats and fisheries in ecologically meaningful scales. This approach also highlights expanding the sustainable management of fisheries and associated ecosystems with deliberate efforts of improving local economies and ensuring that benefits from fisheries are equitably shared by the resource users. In sum, well-defined management initiatives inherently require striking a balance between ecological well-being and human well-being and finding the meaningful connections of fisheries, communities, and development.

### **Goals and Objectives**

The overall goal of the new USAID Philippine Fisheries Activity is to advance sustainable and equitable fisheries management that reduces the threats to marine biodiversity. This new activity is anticipated to build on the success and lessons of USAID's partnerships with BFAR and other government and non-government organizations on fisheries management which evolved from the pioneering success of several generations of assistance - directly supporting local government's efforts of protecting coastal habitats ([Coastal Resources Management Project](#), 1996–2003), building alliances of local governments to manage fisheries resources ([Fisheries Improved for Sustainable Harvest](#), 2003–2010), advancing an ecosystem approach to fisheries management ([Ecosystems Improved for Sustainable Fisheries](#), 2012-2017) and right-sizing fisheries in key seascapes ([Fish Right](#), 2018-to present).

The activity's objectives are as follows:

#### **1. Expanded institutional partnerships of government, communities, and the private sector**

This Activity is anticipated to strengthen the institutional capacities and partnerships of government, private sector, and communities. It will develop collaborative platforms that will increase access to markets, technology, tools, and data that can advance industry-wide sustainable fishing practices. It will catalyze and enhance partnerships along the value chain (e.g., women entrepreneurs, fish consolidators, market distributors, and hotel and restaurant businesses) to enable innovative market incentives and unlock financing for sustainable fisheries. This Activity will also support university partnerships and scientific collaboration on measuring ecosystem conditions, ecological changes from development activities, and climate change impacts on fishery productivity, among others. Collaboration with universities will also initiate innovations and technologies on fisheries post-harvest and economically viable seafood

products. The use of space and data science to enhance vessel monitoring, stock assessments, and harvest strategies will also be supported.

## **2. Increased compliance with science informed policies and regulations**

This Activity will increase the capacities of management and regulatory agencies to right size fisheries in key FMAs. To that end, an assessment of current fish stocks is needed. Conducting a robust fish stock assessment, including both fisheries dependent and independent data, will require improved capacities of the government for data collection and monitoring, analysis, and feedback systems for adaptive management. Establishment of harvest control rules and measures for economically significant fisheries will need competencies on negotiations and consensus building, socio-economic monitoring, social behavior change, and communication. National and FMA policies and action plans supporting management measures will need enabling skills of fisheries officers on IUU fishing assessment, vessel monitoring, and registration and licensing. To aid the enforcement of these policies and plans, this Activity will also work with key judiciary institutions to improve legal processes and adopt protocols for increased compliance. This Activity will also support competency building on effective MPA networks, blue carbon assessments<sup>4</sup>, and local adaptation planning and actions to address climate change in the fisheries sector.

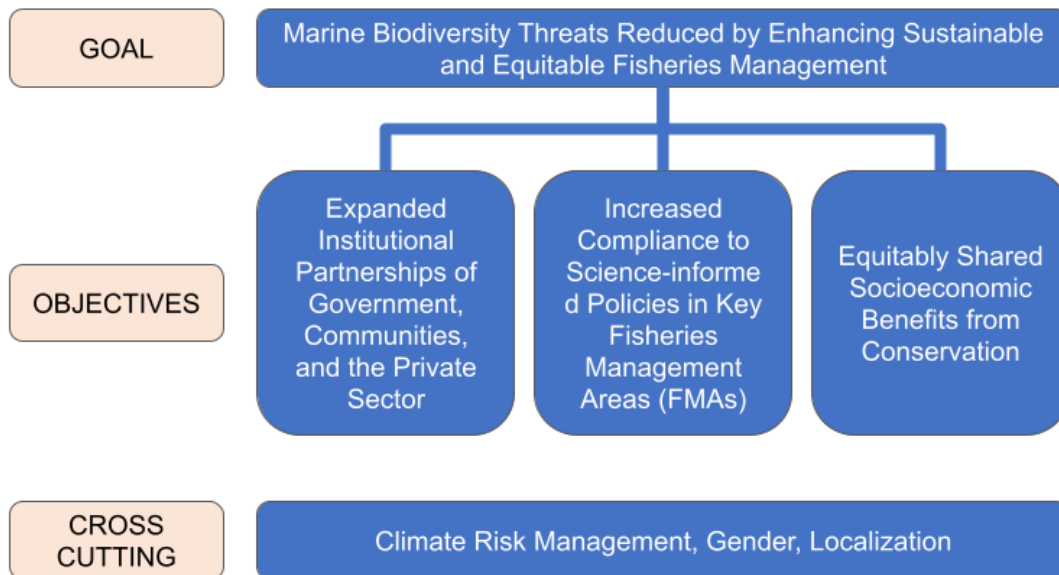
## **3. Increased socio-economic benefits for small-scale fishers and disadvantaged populations**

Many fishers and their families rely on fisheries for income and livelihood. They are the most affected by the impacts of declining catch due to unsustainable fishing. Creating an enabling environment for their active participation in fisheries management, increased financing of livelihood diversification, and wider access to safety nets (e.g., gear swaps, social protection, and insurance) for small-scale fishers and other disadvantaged populations can help mitigate these impacts. This Activity will establish and/or strengthen community organizations, prioritizing small-scale fishers, women, and indigenous peoples. Enforcing fisheries harvest control measures may include recommendations to reduce fishing effort so this Activity will support fisherfolk field schools as learning platforms for small scale fishers, women, and youth to learn and solve fisheries issues, increase peer education and communities of practice, and advocate for community feedback on fisheries harvest control measures. Working with CSOs, this Activity will enable direct actions that will empower local communities in fisheries management and support strategic community conservation based on an understanding of the complex political dynamics of fish exploitation throughout the value chain. This Activity will also enable livelihood diversification, improve financial literacy, and increase social networks to help fishing communities to cope with declining catch, climate change impacts, and economic volatility.

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<sup>4</sup> Blue carbon is carbon dioxide absorbed from the atmosphere and stored in the ocean.

## Results Framework



## Geographic Scope

Initial considerations for site selection, considering the Philippine Government's priority areas, should include the following:

1. Areas with high marine biological significance/marine key biodiversity areas - both source and sink areas in terms of connectivity;
2. Important fishing ground for fish production - meaning the site is important for both food security and livelihoods;
3. High poverty incidence, high incidence of loss of livelihoods in fisheries; and
4. Presence of robust CSO communities (NGOs, universities, and private sector).

Initially, this Activity proposes a geographic focus on the western coastline of the Philippines facing the South China Sea (SCS) (FMA 5 and FMA 6) where large pelagics such as tuna and small pelagics such as scad and mackerels are abundant. Additional sites which are being considered are FMA 1, 4, and 11.

## Instructions for Submission and Questions

### Instructions

Responses to this RFI must be one, single file in Microsoft Word or PDF format and submitted by the closing date and time on the cover letter. Please do not include any organizational literature. Please keep responses to no more than 3 pages in length, 12 pt, Calibri font or similar non serif font. Responses must be submitted in English. Please number each page consecutively. While the limit on the length of submissions is 3 pages, we value concise, issue-specific comments. Please include your organization's name at the top of the page.

Please send responses via email to [manila-roaa-rfa@usaid.gov](mailto:manila-roaa-rfa@usaid.gov) with subject line "RFI # 72049224-EO/RFI-00002 – Philippines Fisheries Activity – Organization Name" no later than the date and time stated on the cover page.

### Questions

1. Given the shift to an FMA structure in the Philippines, what else do you think USAID should consider in designing this new activity to achieve the goal of sustainable and resilient fisheries management in the Philippines and how are you currently or planning to engage?
2. What are the primary opportunities and barriers to catalyze industry-wide stakeholder partnerships on sustainable and resilient fisheries management and scale them to increase both domestic and international market access?
3. How can partnerships with academia or for profit or non-profit entities pursue innovative action-oriented research, including emerging technology, on sustainable and resilient fisheries management at the FMA and national levels?
4. What are the key concerns to foster engagement with various local and marginalized stakeholders at multiple governance levels, and what are considerations that can overcome the barriers for their inclusion and participation to lead to improved social and economic benefits?